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Claims to whiteness: Young unemployed Russian-speakers' declassificatory struggles in Finland

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Abstract
This article analyses the position of young unemployed Russian-speaking migrants in Finland as being both racialised and racialising Others. Young Russian-speakers' claims to whiteness are analysed against the backdrop of their racialised position as well as the neoliberal reshaping of class relations in Finland. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork on young Russian-speakers' employment in Helsinki, the article shows that young Russian-speakers' racialisation of Others is a modality through which their own racialised class position is lived and narrated. Through such boundary-making processes young Russian-speakers resist being classified as 'welfare abusers', the unemployed and low-skilled workers. The article argues that young Russian-speakers' efforts to be recognised as white should be understood as a struggle against classification, through which they generate alternative value as deserving citizens and respectable workers.

Keywords
class, Finland, migration, racism, unemployment, whiteness

Introduction

In this article I examine the production of whiteness by unemployed and precariously employed young Russian-speaking migrants in Finland. Young Russian-speakers' position in Finland is immersed in a process both of being racialised and of racialising Others. Due to historical legacies between Finland and Russia/the Soviet Union, and Finland being part of the Russian Empire, Russian-speaking migrants and minority have been strongly racialised. As a result, many Russian-speaking migrants had to move to positions of a lower social status or become unemployed in Finland, which

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challenged their perceptions of self-worth and crossed the boundaries of respectable citizenship.

Young Russian-speakers' claims to whiteness in Finland offer a novel context for the analysis of the construction of whiteness and migration outside the histories between metropoles and former colonies (Leonard, 2010; Wekker, 2016), migration from the accessive states (Fox, 2013; Fox, Moroşanu, & Szilassy, 2012) or privileged 'white migrations' within the western world (Benson, 2011; Lundström, 2014). Young Russian-speakers' struggles for whiteness take place in the context of particular histories between Finland and Russia, subsequent processes of racialisation and labour market insecurities, as well as neoliberal restructuring of class relations in Finland.

Although the discussions around 'race' and class in Finland have been long silenced as part of an image of an egalitarian nation (Vuorela, 2009), recent work has demonstrated that there are emerging discourses around class-based stigmatisation, the racialisation of class and the construction of racialised migrant groups as an underclass (Kolehmainen, 2017; Mäkinen, 2017). This has taken place against the backdrop of political rhetoric on the dismantling of the welfare state and of discourses around 'passive' welfare claimants, which have been strongly directed against migrant and racialised groups (Keskinen, 2016). There is an increasing pressure to disassociate from the unemployed and 'undeserving' groups in a neoliberal present, which ties into older histories of racialisation.

It is against the background of stigmatising class-making practices and racialisation in Finland that I analyse young unemployed Russian-speakers' racialisation of Others as a modality (Hall, 1980), through which their own racialised class position is lived. Contributing to the discussion on racialisation of whiteness and migration, I argue that Russian-speakers' claims to whiteness should be analysed as a declassificatory struggle, through which they generate alternative values of worth and respectability (Skeggs, 1997; Tyler, 2013). I thus problematise the view of whiteness as a factual property, which can be 'used' by racialised groups (see Fox, 2013), and show how migrants' claims to whiteness are not recognised by the Finnish majority through structural racism. Although whiteness is a central category of my analysis, structural racism remains my key political concern.

The analysis is based on my ethnographic fieldwork on young Russian-speakers' employment in Helsinki, Finland, which was carried out between August 2014 and January 2016. In what follows, I first describe the context of my study, the construction of whiteness in Finland and Russia, and novel forms of class-making and racialisation in Finland. I then discuss how whiteness emerged as a central category during my ethnographic fieldwork. I start my analysis by examining how young migrants narrate their racialised position, followed by how they aim to reassert themselves into whiteness.

Setting the scene: Histories, whiteness, class and Russian-speakers in Finland

There has long been a general silence about 'race' and class in Finland, although class and 'race' intersect in many ways and have been endemic in the construction of national identities in the Nordic region (see Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, & Tuori, 2009). Finland has defined itself as innocent of colonialism and racism, while describing itself in racialised

terms as a 'white' nation (Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009). Finland's own belonging to whiteness and 'Europeanness' has been produced at a cost. Finns were assigned a lower status in the racialised hierarchies produced by scientific racism of the 18th to 20th centuries, which categorised Finns as non-white and non-European (Rastas, 2004). This led some Finnish scholars to invest in forceful counterarguments, many involving the racialisation and subjugation of the Sami people, to prove Finland belonged to Europeanness. Finland's relationship with colonialism, as with other Nordic countries, has been described as 'colonial complicity' to designate 'the processes in which (post) colonial imaginaries, practices and products are made to be part of what is understood as the "national" and "traditional" culture of the Nordic countries' (Mulinari et al., 2009, p. 17). As Gurminder Bhambra's (2014) notion of 'connected sociologies' has shown, the boundaries of colonial conquests are not limited to particular geographical areas, and the Nordic countries did adopt the discourses and material benefits connected to colonial projects (see Mulinari et al., 2009).

Finland's own construction of Europeanness has in many ways been based on antagonism with and distancing from Russia (Puuronen, 2011). Having a common border, the relationship between the two countries has been historically uneasy. The legacies of the historical past such as Finland being part of the Russian Empire until 1917, the Finnish civil war and the Second World War have made the position of the Russian-speaking minority highly visible and racialised. Unlike other migration patterns based on histories of colonialism, the migration of Russians to Finland does not neatly fit into the dominant framework of understanding migration and the division of labour as being based on imperialism and colonial power. Russia itself has an imperial history, in which Finland had a part.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finnish attitudes towards Russians changed from fear to contempt during an ensuing migration wave to Finland. Russian-speakers nowadays represent the largest migrant and minority group in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2016). In 1990 Soviet nationals of Finnish descent, 'Ingrian Finns'[1] who were displaced in the post-Second World War Soviet Union, got the right to apply for repatriation status. While Finland expected to receive 'Finns' through this repatriation programme, many of the returnees were perceived as 'Russians' who were not considered Finnish enough and deemed to have problems with 'integration' (Mähönen, Varjonen, Prindiville, Arnold, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2015). In addition, researchers have argued that since the fall of the socialist system in the 1990s, Eastern and Central Europe has been portrayed as underdeveloped and as being the Other in relation to Western Europe (Mulinari et al., 2009). While some Russian-speakers are EU citizens, the identified 'Russianness' positions them as the Other in Finland.

Nowadays, the attitudes towards Russian-speakers in Finland, along with Somali and Arab migrants, are some of the worst (Jaakkola, 2005). Although it has been claimed that Russian-speakers in Finland have the advantage of a higher education (Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2007), there is evidence that Russian-speakers take labour market positions of a lower social status than their education and qualifications should afford them (Kobak, 2013; Krivonos, 2015a) – most commonly in the employment sectors of cleaning, shop personnel, construction and warehouse work (Statistics Finland, 2014). The Russian-speaking population has also been strongly affected by unemployment (Statistics Finland, 2013).

As a Nordic welfare model, which is, however, being rapidly deteriorated, Finland provides comprehensive and universal social entitlements, to which Russian-speakers with a permanent residence permit have access. In the aftermath of a surge in support for the right-wing populist Finns Party (*Persussuomalaiset*) and the economic crisis, Finland has witnessed an expansion in the rhetoric on migrants as an economic burden on the welfare state. It has become increasingly legitimate to claim that welfare provision should be reserved only 'for our own' or only for working migrants (Keskinen, 2016). Although the discussions centre around welfare-state nationalism, construction of whiteness as normative and common-sense in Finland, as well as Russia's own imperial history, other contexts can be foundational, such as racialisation of class and the moral politics of class in Finland.

Even though it has long been constructed as inappropriate to talk about class in Finland, as part of its image as an egalitarian nation, recent research has discussed the emergence of class-based stigmatisation and the racialisation of class (Kolehmainen, 2017; Mäkinen, 2017). With the introduction of austerity policies, the rhetoric on 'unproductive' members of society has been expanded to include the unemployed population and concretised through the introduction of labour activation policies and the neoliberalisation of welfare services. The boundaries of respectable citizenship have been framed around worker-citizenship, with unemployment framed as a key target of neoliberal policies (Kananen, 2012). Katariina Mäkinen (2017) has observed how the boundaries of respectable citizenship and deservingness in austerity Finland have become increasingly constructed around employment and hard work. Mäkinen (2017) shows how anti-immigrant activism in Finland can be understood as an inner contradiction of a neoliberal citizenship regime: while promising success and recognition for hard-working citizens, these promises are not met in the context of austerity, which makes people claim respectability through distancing themselves from unproductive racialised Others, who have been depicted as a 'burdensome' underclass. Class stigma and the stereotypes of the poor and working class as tasteless, cheap and immoral have been found in the Finnish context (Kolehmainen, 2017), similar to those revealed in the discussion of 'white trash' in the UK and US (Rhodes, 2011; Tyler, 2013; Wray, 2006).

It is against this backdrop of young Russian-speakers' position in Finland's racialised class structures and their emotional responses to this positioning as a result of being racialised, that their racialisation of Others and production of whiteness should be analysed. I now move to review the bodies of work that can be used as an analytical lens to understand these processes.

Whiteness: 'Race', class and respectability

Previous research has started to focus more closely on racialisation of whiteness in migration (Benson, 2011; Fox, 2013; Fox et al., 2012; Lundström, 2014). Research done in the context of accessive states showed how racialised migrants themselves may use racial notions of Others as a resource to negotiate their own marginalisation (Fox, 2013; Ryan, 2010). Jon Fox (2013) has illustrated how Hungarian and Romanian workers in the UK racialise ethnic minorities and the Roma in order to defend the relatively privileged position their 'putative whiteness affords them in the UK's segmented labour market'. Fox

(2013) argues that 'using racism' and their 'putative whiteness', Hungarians and Romanians assign other minorities the status of 'less white' in Britain's racialised hierarchies, and hence, their 'use of racism' makes them white. Louise Ryan's (2010) research on Polish migrants similarly shows how they resist their own stigmatisation through boundary-making processes against other migrant groups and use their supposed whiteness to mix with 'Englishmen' in London. Also, Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir (2014) demonstrates how Icelandic migrants in Norway use their nationality and whiteness to darken more visible groups and place themselves in the invisibly white hegemonic majority.

Although this work offers an important contribution to the under-theorised topic of intra-migrant forms of racialisation and stratification of whiteness, whiteness in this theorising appears as a property of individuals, that has a singular, descriptive and unified definition (see also Hartigan, 1997). As a result, it may dangerously undermine the concept of 'race' and whiteness as socially constructed, and, instead, reify whiteness as a factual and ontological racial category. Stating that Eastern European or Russian-speaking migrants 'use' their whiteness assumes that whiteness is just a matter of skin pigmentation – rather than a structural position of advantage and privilege (Frankenberg, 1993), which migrants from Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union, in fact, do not occupy. In the end, non-white groups do not become white through racialising others since structural racism does not cease to exist.

Magdalena Nowicka's (2017) research on transnational forms of racism is a good starting point to think of migrants' use of racialising discourses as an outcome of transnational negotiations between migrants' past and current experiences, geographies and temporalities. Recent work on racism in Russia has analysed how since the fall of the Soviet Union, the discourse of 'race' has been used to reassert Russia in the western project of modernity while simultaneously clinging to Russia's authenticity (Zakharov, 2015). Through the development of physical anthropology, state discourses and anti-immigrant movements in post-Soviet Russia, 'Russianness' has been reinscribed into whiteness as part of the 'civilised', 'modernised' and 'racially superior' West. Furthermore, Russian leadership has tried to challenge western domination by reconstructing the Russian nation as 'true Europe' that will carry the 'white man's burden'. The state anti-western discourse has used a racial depiction of Europe as washed over by the flood of non-white migrants and indulging in self-destructive 'political correctness'. Russian identity in Russia has largely acquired a racial character as white and 'civilised' (Zakharov, 2015, p. 126), with colour-based references to people's phenotypical traits and racialisation of people from the Caucasian region and Central Asia as 'black' (Roman, 2002).

Majority Russians' privileged[2] position in these hierarchies as white has been challenged after migration to Finland, which has also positioned them as the unemployed or low-skilled workers in an austere and welfare chauvinistic context. Whiteness is cross-cut by class,[3] and 'race' is lived through class relations. Stuart Hall (1980, p. 341) has famously argued that 'race is the *modality* in which class is "lived", the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and "fought through" '. This is how class experience can be rearticulated through a racist ideological syntax (Hall, 1980, p. 341). Satnam Virdee (2014) has explored how 'race' is central to how class struggles work, and how racism can

bifurcate class identities. The organisation of labour has been a critical site through which whiteness has been claimed (Ignatiev, 1995; Leonard, 2010; Roediger, 1991). In the US, whiteness as a signifier of a 'free white man's work' could not exist without its opposite – enslaved people, from which Italian and Irish workers distanced themselves and subsequently claimed whiteness as free workers (Ignatiev, 1995). In Britain, working classes, long excluded from the project of whiteness, then became white through the rise of nationalism and the welfare state (Bonnett, 1998; Virdee, 2014). Whiteness and worker-identity are also strongly associated, with unemployment perceived as a loss of white respectability. Research has demonstrated how white working-class men with limited access to employment or high-paying jobs sustain their privilege through Othering and relational boundary-making against migrants and minorities (Fine, Weis, Addelston, & Marusza, 1997; Lamont, 2000; Nayak, 2003).

Recent theorisation that conceptualises class as a *struggle against the effects of classification* (Tyler, 2013, 2015, p. 507) is a useful analytical tool to understand the effects of being simultaneously racialised and classified as a low-skilled worker or the unemployed. Imogen Tyler (2015) has called to expose and critique the consequences of classificatory systems as well as the forms of value and judgement on people's experiences of class. Tyler (2013) has approached declassificatory struggles as an intersectional account of marginality and resistance to being classified in stigmatising terms. People experience stigmatising judgements and narrate class in moral terms of self-worth, anxiety and value (Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2001; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). Shildrick and MacDonald's (2013) research on people caught in the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle in Britain has revealed processes of distancing from others in similar disadvantaged positions, which is a result of the pressure to disassociate from the undeserving poor. These processes – although more recent – are certainly not dissimilar to those in Finland with an increasing stigmatisation and racialisation of class (Kolehmainen, 2017). I therefore analyse how young Russian-speakers attempt to reassert themselves into whiteness as a struggle against classification through the use of transnational racialising discourses.

A multi-sited ethnography of young Russian-speakers' employment in Helsinki

The data I use were produced as part of a research project on migrant youth employment in Helsinki. I conducted an ethnographic study of young Russian-speakers' employment in the Helsinki metropolitan area, which has the highest concentration of Russian-speakers and minorities in Finland. I interviewed a total of 54 young Russian-speakers aged 20–32 years, 20 of whom were male and 34 female, from Russia, Estonia, Moldova, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and Armenia – the majority of my research participants come from Russia and Estonia, which represent the two largest migrant groups in Finland and whose interview excerpts I draw on in this article. Despite coming from different countries and self-identifications, many of these young people were often identified as 'Russians' in Finland due to their mother tongue. I recruited my participants through municipal career-counselling services, integration and language courses, where I did my observations, as well as informal meetings to which I was invited by my participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. I analysed the interviews using a

close-reading method (Watson & Wilcox, 2000), which meant reading and organising interview material along key themes.

The interviews were done in Russian, lasted on average 80 minutes and were semi-structured around the young people's biographies, their lives before and after moving to Finland. I also spent a lot of time informally with my participants staying at their places or walking around the city to achieve a sense of trust and a better understanding of their lives outside timely designated interview settings. These young people had different migration histories: some of them grew up in Finland, some were naturalised citizens, others moved to Finland recently. All of them but one were born outside Finland. Most of my participants already had vocational or higher degrees from their home countries. The majority used to be university students or white-collar workers in banks, schools, NGOs, architect agencies, law firms, translation agencies. Young people described their migration projects as an adventure, a search for better life opportunities with an intention to establish their lives abroad. After migration to Finland, many experienced status discord when their degrees and work experience did not transfer to Finland, forcing them to move to lower skilled occupations or to become unemployed (Krivonos, 2015a).

There is an assumption that studying whiteness is ethically less problematic as it does not require the mediation of racial and cultural difference (Back, 2001). Although sharing a similar background in terms of nationality and age, the fact that I had a job at the university positioned me differently, as did the fact that I experienced a rather smooth transition from being a student to becoming a funded PhD candidate. Also, I found it uncomfortable when, after kindly inviting me to their homes, my participants would make racist statements, which I then challenged. Those statements often seemed so routinised that it confused me how it was considered normal to express them in front of a person they hardly knew. These situations reminded me of what Catrin Lundström (2010) described as a 'white space of privilege' in ethnographic work. It was through a 'sense of disorientation' (Back, 2001), surprise and confusion about how to understand their talk that whiteness revealed itself as a key concept, even though it did not inform my research design from the start.

I assume, however, that had I been a Finnish researcher, I would not have come to hear such expressions. My participants often saw majority white Finns as racists who are able to mask it with what they referred to as 'political correctness'. It was also their disillusionment with the purported construction of Finland as an open, inclusive and non-racist society that freed them to be so open with me. Moreover, in Russia, 'political correctness' has been often publicly discussed in terms of hegemony of western imperialism (Zakharov, 2015, p. 105), which may explain their use of a particular racialising language which reproduced difference based on colour as opposed to what had been called 'cultural racism' (see also Nowicka, 2017 for a similar case of Polish migrants in London).

My analysis, however, is not to claim that none of my research participants articulated counterarguments and critically engaged with racialising discourses, like Oleg, for example: 'No matter what they say about other migrants, Arabs and guys from Africa, that they are crazy and uncivilised, I don't buy into that. I spent time with them, and they are really cool.' My ethical aim is neither to depict them as racists nor to apologise for racist speech but to analyse the ways my research participants make value and defend themselves against their own racial stigma through the assertion of whiteness.

What is your worth? Young migrants' perceptions of self-worth, class mobility and respectability

Immersed in the lives of young Russian-speaking migrants in Finland, I quickly became conscious of the strong emotional responses of my participants while describing their life situations. Being unrecognised as qualified workers or skilled professionals, receiving unemployment benefits, taking low-prestige jobs and being looked down on when doing this work were common descriptions of their experiences. Their racialised class position came into being through the feelings of being less valued, respected and worthy. It became clear that decent work that matched their education and experience was crucial for their perceptions of self-worth. These arguments can be well illustrated through Marina's[4] and Olga's stories. Marina – a maths teacher from Russia by education – shared her feelings on migration to Finland and joblessness during our interview:

> First, I felt that that it is wonderful that in Finland you can receive unemployment benefits and attend language courses, but now, after two years of not being able to find a job, I feel that depression has slowly reached me, that I am not seen as a professional here. Sometimes I am even ashamed to go out somewhere, talk to people, say that I have no job here, I am afraid people will judge me and say that I came here, I have no job and do not even speak proper Finnish. I sometimes have this slight fear of revealing myself here.

Marina mentions how she is concerned that she is not seen as a professional in Finland and how unemployment as a foreigner entails feelings of fear, being judged and discomfort at 'revealing herself'. There is an emotional politics of class that is expressed in the excerpt (see Skeggs, 1997, p. 75) as a result of migration and misrecognition. Marina, like many others, shares a feeling that she lacks a sense of fulfilment as a professional. Not speaking 'proper Finnish' is also about becoming visible as a foreigner. Presenting oneself as an unemployed migrant breaks the norm when employment is a key criterion of migrants' integration (Keskinen, 2016) and of life in a worker society (Anderson, 2015). Anxiety and fear about 'revealing oneself' informed the production of Marina's subjectivity. As in other interviews, Marina's class mobility and migration were narrated in emotional terms of shame, anxiety, judgement and insecurity. Many reported stigmatisation for living off taxpayers: 'I hear people telling me: you came here unemployed just to live on taxpayers' money' is a prototypical refrain. As other researchers have argued, the claiming of unemployment benefits is dishonourable and exemplifies an aspect of failed citizenship (Anderson, 2015), especially in Finland where the norm of a full employment society is grounds for the welfare state and where there is a growing public anxiety around welfare.

In relation to the stigma of 'parasitical welfare scroungers', many young Russian-speakers have internalised the social judgement as self-contempt (Miller, 1997, in Tyler, 2013). This stigmatisation theme has been circulating not only in the dominant Finnish public discourses but in those of the Russian-speaking population in Finland, too. When I have used Russian-speaking entrepreneurs' services such as hair salons, for example, and said that I am doing research on Russian-speakers' employment, it was not uncommon to hear some say, 'Why would they need to search for work if you can simply live

on the welfare money?' This reproduction of public discourses echoes Back, Sinha and Bryan's (2012) findings that the status anxiety that young migrants experience in Britain makes them fall into a similar pattern of viewing other migrants through the same lens of suspicion.

The metaphor of 'revealing oneself' which Marina used, is not uncommon. Another interviewee, Olga, on one occasion invited me to go to a Helsinki expat gathering – a place attended by EU citizen migrants, working in international companies, mainly from Western Europe and the US. She explained:

> You know, I cannot invite other friends of mine to go there, will I have to say that we are all cleaners or work at Lidl, when we introduce ourselves to people there? At least, I will have you, you work in a university, while I won't tell people that I work as a cleaner.

Olga had a degree in social sciences from Russia and a bachelor's degree from a polytechnic university in Helsinki. Despite this, she worked as a cleaner after many attempts to find a job elsewhere. The episode with the Helsinki expat meeting illustrates Olga's awareness of class distinctions and judgements about her social status in Finland from the side of so-called 'expats' – those whose white middle-class privileges were maintained in Finland. The extract illustrates her strategies to conceal her position in Finland as well as her discomfort at revealing her occupation. It was my own occupation that worked as a symbolic pass for us to attend an 'expat' party. Like Marina, Olga did not want to reveal herself and be openly subject to the white middle-class expat judgement, to which she was denied symbolic access through her racialised occupation and class in Finland.

During our meet-ups at her place, Olga often repeated and mentioned that she was proud to have a degree in social sciences and another degree from Finland despite combining studies with hard daily work. She would constantly emphasise her decency in terms of her higher education and knowledge: 'Living here I always remember our philosophy lecturer telling us that even if we never apply this knowledge directly, this knowledge will shape us as humans forever and will help us approach life philosophically.' Despite valuing themselves as highly educated, intelligent and respectable people, Olga and Marina articulate awareness of the pressure of negative judgements of them not only as migrants or Russian-speakers, but as the unemployed or employed in racialised, low-skilled jobs. They care about how they are positioned with respect to class and how others see them. In addition, they have transferred racial knowledge and hierarchies dominant in Russia, in which ethnic Russians have been placed as white – a position that has been challenged after migration to Finland. It is through these feelings of being less valued, respected and worthy that class and racialisation come into being in their daily lives.

A 'political arithmetic' (Skeggs, 2005, p. 20) of fitting Russian-speaking migrants in Finland into preordained classifications results in a failure, precisely because migration and racialisation disrupt people's capitals and create classifications that mismatch their own perceptions of self-worth. After migration to Finland, many Russian-speakers experienced a 'contradictory class mobility' (Parreñas, 2001, pp. 150–153), like Olga and Marina, where for many their economic position might have improved while their social status and respectability declined through racialisation and misrecognition. While conventional and rigid classificatory terms are unproductive and harmful to describe their

racialised class position in Finland, I understand their claims to whiteness precisely as a way to resist these stigmatising classifications. In a class-ridden racist society such as Finland, these discourses are readily available through the descriptions of welfare-scrounging asylum seekers (Keskinen, 2016) and undeserving 'white trash' (Kolehmainen, 2017), to which I turn below.

Claims to whiteness

Young unemployed Russian-speaking migrants narrated their position of being racialised and classed within relations of contestation, uncertainty and anxiety. Take the case of Alexander, who did not manage to find work in Finland and now receives income support and subsidised housing. Before finishing the interview, I asked him if he would like to add something to sum up, and he gave this answer:

> I think Finland should change its migration policy. They should take fewer asylum seekers and take more rich people who can sustain themselves in Finland. They come here to get all the welfare benefits. OK, we can take the asylum seekers but the welfare benefits should be only for Finns. Yeah, I also get benefits but I just can't find work, I have no way out from my situation, that's why I am unemployed. While there are others, asylum seekers, lazy ones, who just take a plane here to get the benefits, they are simply not able to work. They should go to other countries because *we* suffer from that, *we* live here and *we* suffer because of them.

Similar to the sentiment in public discourses in Finland, Alexander is concerned that migration is a heavy burden on the welfare state despite his own position as one of the unemployed. He first offers a classed criterion that only 'rich people' should be granted residence. He then argues that benefits should be reserved only for Finns. Being a Russian national, he then immediately argues that he just happened to become unemployed as he is actually willing to work, unlike asylum seekers who are racialised as lazy and work-shy. The figure of the 'asylum seeker' subject, to which Alexander refers, now covers anyone, from a working migrant, to a student, to a refugee (Clarke & Garner, 2010, p. 5). But primarily, it is someone who drains public resources and is not white. As has been previously argued, in the context of racialised discussions around entitlements and the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, the arguments have shifted from access to employment to include discourses on who is entitled to welfare benefits (Clarke & Garner, 2010). Anti-refugee racism and their depiction as lacking a work culture can be analysed as a local articulation of racism, which has been appropriated through public discussions in Finland on the burden of migration on the Finnish welfare state (Keskinen, 2016). And this is the same position as the unemployed or low-skilled workers, in which Russian-speakers have been placed in Finland and which challenges their self-respect. Indeed, Alexander acknowledges that he is positioned in similar ways as racialised migrant Others receiving welfare benefits. Through assigning the 'asylum seeker' figure the place of 'cultural lack of work ethic', he creates space for claiming his own strong work ethic and consequently for belonging and entitlement. Racialisation of migrant Others then works as a form of distinction, through which his space for whiteness as a respectable worker-identity is claimed.

The following example shows the hierarchies of whiteness and how they are mediated through class and respectability. Alina moved to Finland as an Ingrian Finn and was finishing an integration course. During the interview, Alina told me that she saw little chance of finding work in Finland without retraining and that she would rather try to open her own business, for which, however, she did not have enough money. While talking about her insecurities in Finland, she suddenly mentioned a 'refugee' figure:

Alina : It was really difficult here, not finding housing, not finding a job. But now it will be even worse as all these refugees are coming here. Shopping malls are full of them.
Author : So what's wrong with them?
Alina : It is just they are not able to behave. We lived in a district where only Finns lived, one Roma family and one family from Cameroon. Really, the Cameroonian family is really nice, they are well educated, the man works, their kids wear beautiful clothes, they go to church, they are clean – they are a cool family. But now Arabs came, Somalians, everything is dirty now, it is horrible. There is not a single white child in the courtyard, not a single white person. And they all received housing so easily.

There are multiple regimes of racism and racialisation in this excerpt. First, Alina evaluates her courtyard and neighbours in colour-based terms as 'non-white', while she asserts herself through dominant racial whiteness gazing at the visible others. Alina takes a hegemonic position of judging on who can belong to her neighbourhood through drawing colour lines and asserting herself as white. Now she is the one who classifies. I have also discussed elsewhere how Russian-speakers can move into whiteness and pass as Finns by deploying various strategies like not speaking Russian or choosing particular clothing styles in everyday life (Krivonos, 2015b). At the same time, Alina's own insecurities in Finland are narrated in a close connection with the images of a racialised Other, who in fact takes a very similar structural position in the Finnish society to that of Alina. Alina is afraid that she will have to compete for resources with newly arrived immigrants and her precarious position as unemployed will get worse. Her racial vision, which she transferred from Russia, and where she considers herself white, comes in a conflict with her understanding of her own structural position in Finland, when she has to 'compete' with those she has racialised as non-white. Alina's valuing of herself as a respectable white, which she expected to maintain in Finland, is challenged by being positioned in Finland's racialised hierarchies together with supposedly non-working Others. Whiteness is also mediated by class when she constructs the family from Cameroon through respectable middle-classness: working, being well educated, attending church, having beautiful clothes and sustaining itself without welfare benefits. It is the figure of the non-deserving and non-white Other, who 'received housing so easily', against which the boundary is drawn and her respectable whiteness is reinscribed. Whiteness does not exist as an ontological category to be 'used' against 'non-white' groups but works as a distinction, in which racialised boundaries of belonging and respectability are fragile and unstable.

Besides, it is not only migrants who are excluded from the space of whiteness. 'White trash' has emerged as a racialised class figure in Finland as well (Kolehmainen, 2017),

against which the boundary is drawn, too. Here is an extract from my field diary when Alexander and I were walking in the centre of the city. We left the employment centre for young people and were talking about his situation on the street:

> I could say that I live off the welfare money, but I am working hard to get a job, I search for it every day. *(As we were standing next to the railway station, he pointed to a group of drunk Finns passing us by.)* Look, all the country is like that. If they want to keep paying all the benefits on which these drunkies are living, they need people who are willing to work – just like me, for example. *(Then another group of loud Finns passed by.)* You see what competition you can have here.

Alexander builds his narrative on the valuation of work as essential for the contours of belonging and respectable citizenship (see Mäkinen, 2017). He constructs his position against 'white abjects' – Finnish 'drunkies' – who are not able to sustain themselves without benefits and supposedly lack a work culture. Like in the excerpt about asylum seekers, Alexander uses discourse on work ethics to distance himself from welfare-dependent groups. Through depicting Finns in a demeaning light, he devalues classificatory systems which have been imposed on him by the majority population. By mentioning 'competition', Alexander refers to the rules of a neoliberal citizenship regime, where success is achieved through hard work and competition, while those on benefits lack a work culture. Alexander then uses the same language that has positioned him as 'undeserving' to categorise Others in the exact same terms.

Similarly, when Olga had a conflict with her employer in a cleaning company, she told me this:

> You know what I told them, the managers? I told them that it is not a problem for me to become unemployed and live off welfare like Finnish alcoholics do. I have two degrees, doing this job! And there is no queue for the job I am doing!

Olga's narrative shows how she is evaluated by the Finnish majority, which positions her to do work to which she does not feel any belonging, and how she evaluates this majority in stigmatising terms to devalue their power in establishing any classificatory systems over her. It is a feeling of injustice of being positioned as a 'low-skilled worker' by the majority Finns, whose own work ethic and entitlement Olga questions. Through making boundaries against racialised and classed groups, Olga symbolically reinscribes her whiteness as deserving and as a respectable person with two degrees. Yet, these claims and her value of herself as a person with a higher education and other skills remain unrecognised.

Conclusions

In this article I have analysed the claims of young migrants who are in a position of being both racialised and racialising. Rather than assuming that they use their supposed factual whiteness against other groups, I have analysed how they attempt to produce whiteness as a struggle for recognition and for the generation of personhood with alternative value (Skeggs, 1997). Racialisation of others is a modality (Hall, 1980) through which their own racialised and classed position is lived and narrated. Although Finland might have

long silenced questions about 'race' and class, maintaining the image of an egalitarian Nordic welfare state (see also Kolehmainen, 2017; Näre & Nordberg, 2016 for critique), it became clear that the presence of young Russian-speakers in Finland did reproduce classificatory systems that positioned them as undeserving racialised migrant welfare claimants or as low-skilled migrant workers who are looked down on. Being classified in these terms did not match their perceptions of self-worth as they narrated their racialised class position in emotional and moral terms of misrecognition, embarrassment and anxiety. I argue that their attempts to reinscribe whiteness through subjugating other vulnerable groups should be understood as a *struggle against classification* (Tyler, 2013), in which they resist imposed categorisations and carve out spaces for respectability and worth. Their reconstitution of respectable identity takes place through disidentification with Others positioned in similar terms as well as through the generation of alternative value as deserving and good workers. It is crucial to highlight that these claims are not recognised as and processed into hegemonic whiteness. The value of respectability and worth they attempt to generate remains unrecognised through structural racism.

Analysing how racism breaks class solidarities concerning the welfare state along the racialised lines of deserving and non-deserving, one cannot but echo the words of Stuart Hall (1997, pp. 56–57) on 'how the discourse of "race" silences some of the other dimensions that were positioning individuals and groups in exactly the same way. [How] it ignored their positioning in class terms, in similar work situations, exposed to the same deprivation of poor jobs and lack of promotion.' Hall's unsettling words in the context of Britain certainly do not sound anachronistic in local contexts with very different imperial and colonial histories such as Finland and Russia. These principles of racism play out in the reconfiguration of class relations and in moral distinctions between those with respectable work and those without. The narratives of the young Russian-speakers demonstrate how neoliberal ideologies, in which one's worth and belonging can be achieved only through hard work, success and not being identified as 'white trash' on welfare, go hand in hand with racism and the old *divide et impera* logic, through which one's belonging and deservingness are claimed at the cost of other groups.

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Notes

1. Ingrian Finns are the descendants of 17th to early 20th century Finnish immigrants to the Ingria region (now the area around St Petersburg).

2. Most of my research participants come from majority backgrounds in Russia. The situation is different for ethnic Russians in the Baltic states, particularly in Estonia, which is a significant country of origin for people migrating to Finland. The Russian minority represents 30% of the Estonian population and is often denied employment largely due to official language requirements: Estonian is at this time the only official language, which also applies to the school system.
3. Although I am aware of how whiteness can be structured, challenged and produced through gender (see Ferber, 2007; Lundström, 2014), the analysis of gendered formations of whiteness is beyond the scope of this article.
4. All the names are pseudonyms.

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